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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: SE NATSIOS DELIVERS STRONG MESSAGE OF SUPPORT FOR
SPLA MODERNIZATION

REF: A. KHARTOUM 00292
[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 00350

Classified By: DCM R. Powers, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) SE Natsios delivered a strong message of support for the modernization of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in a meeting with senior SPLA officers on March 6. SPLA Chief of Staff Oyai Deng said he faces enormous difficulty in simultaneously absorbing thousands of former militia into the SPLA, professionalizing the army, and cutting thousands of troops from the army's rolls. Deng also accused Khartoum of redeploying militia in the South and embarking on a dangerous arms procurement program. End Summary.

USG Assistance to SPLA Modernization

[1](#)2. (C) "Is our assistance program working?" Natsios asked bluntly. "Yes," Deng replied, "we are happy." "That's good," said the Special Envoy, "because you weren't happy six months ago." The SPLA chief, joined by three of his four deputy chiefs of staff, said various USG-funded initiatives, including an interim general headquarters for the SPLA just north of Juba, are on track after serious delays. Deng also said he welcomed the proposed deployment of U.S. military and/or civilian defense advisors to work on strategic planning and any support the U.S. could provide--directly or through intermediaries--for SPLA training.

[1](#)3. (C) The SPLA has a small committee of officers working on a strategic plan, Deng explained. Former Ethiopian Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Gebretensae Tsadkan has been brought on as a senior advisor, with support from the British development agency DFID (Ref. A), and is planning to recruit additional staff. U.S. advisors could join the SPLA's ongoing planning initiatives, Deng said, though he understood the deployment of U.S. personnel could "take time." U.S. assistance is likewise very desirable for Kenyan instructors at a "specialized unit" training facility now under construction at Mapel in Western Bahr el-Ghazal State. However, there is a "big problem" of payment for the Kenyans, Deng interjected. When the Kenyan Department of Defense (KDOD) learned that the U.S. might support the Kenyan deployment, Deng claimed, the Kenyans "inflated their per diem." The SPLA had not budgeted these payments, and the Kenyans had declined to pay per diem to their trainers directly. The problem remains unresolved. Deng also noted other training initiatives,

including assistance from the Ethiopian military to the SPLA division based near Malakal, in Upper Nile State along the Ethiopian border. SE Natsios proposed that if the U.S. is unable to support training inside Sudan--perhaps because of visa problems for U.S. trainers--we should consider flying SPLA personnel to Djibouti for training at CENTCOM's Camp Lemonier. Deng and his senior staff agreed.

¶4. (C) Finally, Deng confirmed earlier discussions with U.S. representatives (Ref. A) that the SPLA seek U.S. assistance in constructing divisional headquarters facilities in two sensitive regions: Mapel (to cover the greater Bahr el-Ghazal area, bordering Darfur and the Central African Republic), and Bentiu (near key oil fields and the contested area of Abyei). Deng said he understood that funds might not be adequate to support a third headquarters facility near Malakal. However, Deng emphasized, the Malakal area is also potentially volatile and the SPLA would consider "cost sharing" if U.S. funds were available to finance a percentage of the construction costs.

SPLA's Challenges

¶5. (C) "Internally, we have a lot of problems," Deng admitted. There are "almost 200,000" men and women on the army's payrolls, Deng said, including 74,000 members of various militia absorbed in the aftermath of the January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Food and salaries for these forces, Deng claimed, consume 85 percent of the SPLA's 550 million dollar-plus annual budget. The SPLA would have liked to cut 40,000 troops last year and another 35,000 this year, Deng said, but has been unable to do so. He and other senior SPLA leadership had informed Government of Southern

Sudan (GOSS) President Salva Kiir that the SPLA will face serious problems unless the government summons the political will to carry out serious downsizing. For this, international support for DDR programs is vital. So far, Deng claimed, UN-backed DDR programs have made virtually no impact in the south. Even in the southern capital of Juba, he explained, there are three or four current and former militia groups who have been neither disarmed nor effectively integrated into the SPLA.

¶6. (C) The SPLA also perceives a growing threat from Khartoum. The Sudan Armed Forces' (SAF) new chief of staff is "very, very difficult" and part of a hawkish cabal that includes Sudanese Minister of Defense Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein, Deng said (Ref. B). On March 4, Deng claimed, Khartoum deployed 800 militia to the Bentiu area. SAF said these forces were "part of their component" of a Joint Integrated Unit (JIU), Deng said, but "we told them no, they should bring only regular SAF forces." The SPLA chief also complained that both SAF and ex-militia elements are being incorporated in an unauthorized Petroleum Security Force now deployed in the oilfields along the border between northern and southern Sudan. Deng accused SAF of training additional militia "near Khartoum," explaining that many of the trainees are southerners and that SPLA was well apprised of the program. SAF has also embarked on an ambitious military procurement program from Russian, Belarussian and Chinese suppliers, Deng asserted.

Comment

¶7. (C) The SPLA leadership provided a sobering and remarkably candid assessment of their army's shortcomings and the challenges it faces both today and in the short-term future. A well-designed and administered program of non-lethal assistance is essential to making the SPLA more professional, and therefore a more effective guarantor of peace. The diversion of budget resources from development programs to paying military salaries is particularly disturbing. Equally essential is the political will in the GOSS and the SPLA to

undertake necessary reforms, including significant
downsizing. End comment.
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